

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 02730 222205Z
ACTION OES-07

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R 222116Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7058

UNCLAS BOGOTA 2730

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: TOCY, CO
SUBJ: R/V ALPHA HELIX

REF: A) STATE 071125; B) BOGOTA 2643

1. REFTEL (B) REPORTED GRANTING OF CLEARANCE TO VESSEL FOR MARCH 23 RETURN TO COLOMBIAN TERRITORIAL WATERS. HOWEVER, FOR REASONS OF SPEED, DETAILS OF THE DIFFICULTIES ENTAILED WERE OMITTED.

2. EMBASSY WAS NOT AWARE THAT R/V ALPHA HELIX WAS GOING TO RETURN TO COLOMBIA UNTIL MONDAY, MARCH 20, AT 16:00. A PHONE CALL WAS RECEIVED FROM COLONEL JULIO LONDONO, CHIEF, DIVISION OF FRONTIERS, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN RELATIONS DURING WHICH LONDONO INFORMED EMBOFF THAT DR. SERGIO LONDONO, BIOLOGIST, INDERENA, HAD RECEIVED A TELEGRAM FROM THE ALPHA HELIX REQUESTING HIM TO BE IN SAN ANDRES ON MARCH 23. LONDONO STATED THAT THE DIRECTOR ON INDERENA WAS FURIOUS BECAUSE THE REQUEST HAD BEEN DIRECTED TO ONE OF HIS SCIENTISTS AND THAT HE COMPLAINED TO THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE WHO, IN TURN, COMPLAINED TO THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS.

3. THIS COMPLAINT FURTHER COMPLICATED AN ALREADY DIFFICULT SITUATION. ADMIRAL CAMACHO, DIRECTOR, DIRECCION MARITIMA Y PORTUARIA, WAS OUT OF TOWN AND HIS APPROVAL WAS NECESSARY BEFORE
UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02730 222205Z

ANY CLEARANCE WAS GRANTED. THE NAVY ALSO HAD TO BE INFORMED BOTH IN BOGOTA AND IN SAN ANDRES. WITHOUT THESE APPROVALS, COL. LONDONO INFORMED EMBOFF THAT THE VESSEL RISKED SEIZURE BY THE COLOMBIAN NAVY UPON ITS APPEARANCE IN SAN ANDRES.

4. EMBASSY REALIZES THAT R/V ALPHAS HELIX HAD INDICATED THE POSSIBLE NEED TO RETURN TO SAN ANDRES AND PROVIDENCIA AT THIS

TIME BUT AN ADDITIONAL OPTION HAD ALSO BEEN INDICATED (ISLA DE MAIZ GRANDE, NICARAGUA). SINCE NO CONFIRMATION WAS RECEIVED AS TO WHICH OPTION WOULD BE SELECTED, IT WAS ASSUMED THAT THE SECOND ONE HAD BEEN CHOSEN AND THAT SAN ANDRES WAS ELIMINATED.

5. FOR THE FUTURE, WE RECOMMEND THAT WHEN RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS LEAVE OPEN VARIOUS OPTIONAL ITINERARIES, THEY CONFIRM WHICH OPTION WILL BE SELECTED AT LEAST FIFTEEN DAYS IN ADVANCE. WE ALSO URGE THAT RESEARCH EXPEDITIONS AVOID SENDING INSTRUCTIONS DIRECTLY TO THE PARTICIPATING SCIENTIST AND INSTEAD EMPLOY EMBASSY CHANNELS SO THAT PROPER STEPS MAY BE TAKEN AND SITUATIONS SIMILAR TO THAT DESCRIBED IN PARA 2 CAN BE AVOIDED.

6. COLONEL LONDONO WORKED EXTREMELY HARD AND EFFICIENTLY ON THIS AFFAIR. IF HE HAD NOT BEEN PRESENT, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE CLEARANCE WOULD HAVE BEEN OBTAINED. COL. LONDONO INFORMED EMBASSY THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD TO INTERVENE PERSONALLY TO OBTAIN THIS CLEARANCE. EMBASSY SUGGESTS THAT DEPARTMENT RECOMMEND THAT R/V ALPHA HELIX WRITE A LETTER TO LONDONO EXPLAINING THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THE DECISION TO RETURN AND THANKING HIM FOR HIS EXTENSIVE EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE RESEARCH TEAM. ASECIO

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